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Three roads to populism? An Italian field study on the 2019 European election

Abstract

Objectives. We predicted populist orientation and vote for two populist parties, the Five Star Movement (FSM) and the League, in the 2019 European election by focusing on perceived economic threat, perceived cultural threat, dissatisfaction with representative democracy, and on first-order interactions.

Method. We surveyed a quota sample of the Italian adult general population ($N = 1,504$) and tested a latent moderated structural equations model aimed at predicting participants' populist vote and populist orientation.

Results. Perceived cultural threat and dissatisfaction with democracy were positively associated with populist orientation. Dissatisfaction with democracy was positively associated with votes for the FSM, while perceived cultural threat was positively associated with votes for the League. Perceived economic threat was negatively associated with votes for the League.

Conclusion. Populist orientation and populist vote share just some predictors, and are associated with main effects only, but not with interactions between perceived cultural, economic, and political variables.

Keywords: Populist orientation; Populist vote; Prediction

1 **Introduction**

2 Populism has dramatically spread in the last decades, and now it is a crucial feature both in Western (Marchlewska,
3 Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, and Batayneh 2018) and in developing countries (Obschonka, Stuetzer, Rentfrow,
4 Lee, Potter, and Gosling 2018). Populist leaders, such as Tsipras in Greece, Hofer in Austria, Wilders in the
5 Netherlands, Orbán in Hungary, Farage in the UK, and Le Pen in France, have become increasingly influential in the
6 European political arena. The president of the USA, Donald Trump, has been defined as “the populist *par excellence*”
7 (Young, Ziemer, and Jackson 2019), and the pro-Brexit vote was pushed by strong populist sentiments among the UK’s
8 electorate (Zappettini and Kryzanowski 2019). Italy is no exception. The parties considered to have the most populist
9 agendas, the Lega (League) and the Movimento 5 stelle (Five Star Movement, FSM), gained 50.1% of the valid votes in
10 the 2018 general election. Following this triumph, they came together to govern the country. In the 2019 European
11 election, they cemented their accomplishment by gaining, together, 51.4% of the valid votes. Despite this widespread
12 success, the social and psychological factors promoting populism are not yet clear.

13 The vast majority of the scientific community agrees with Mudde’s (2007) definition of populism as “a thin-
14 centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the
15 pure people’ versus the ‘corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté général*
16 (general will) of the people” (p. 23). In light of this, populism has three main features. First, it is a vision of the people
17 as an organic, homogeneous and virtuous entity, in contrast with the corrupt political and economic élite. In this light,
18 populism is rooted in the idea that, while the will of the people should primarily guide policy decisions, it is routinely
19 undermined by manipulative, entrepreneurial political elites (Hawkins, Riding, and Mudde 2012). This critical vision of
20 the influence of élites over society and politics stands in opposition to an elitist vision of democracy (e.g. Jones 2020).
21 Consistent with this, the political conflict is conceived as vertical, with the virtuous people being subjugated by the
22 corrupt élite, instead of horizontal – that is, among different interest groups all belonging to the people (e.g., Kriesi
23 2014). Second, there is a perceived refusal of institutional intermediation between individual citizens and the state,
24 through a leader who speaks directly in the name of the people and expresses their concerns organically (Kriesi and
25 Pappas 2015). Populism—with its redemptive vision of democracy, hinged on a “romantic impulse of directness,
26 spontaneity and the overcoming of alienation” (Canovan, 1999 p. 10)—questions the basic principles of the norms of
27 liberalism (Molyneaux and Osborne 2017). Third, there is an idea that traditional ideologies have become obsolete and
28 outdated, and they should be substituted by citizens’ common sense (Mudde 2007).

29 Populism neatly crosses ideological boundaries, regardless of country, because it is less an ideology than a
30 general commitment to the idea that democracy is drifting away from popular control and the world would be better off
31 if everyday people, rather than political élites, take the control back. It is often expressed through generalized anger or

frustration that political decisions are being made outside of the control of the democratic citizenry (Magni 2017; Matsusaka, 2020; Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen 2018). However, populism is often combined with a host-ideology (Mudde 2004), which can lead followers to the left or right, and it is crucial in determining the nature of the antagonism between the *people* and the *élite* (Huber and Ruth-Lovell 2017). For example, relying on the distinction between populists conceiving *people as a nation* and *people as a class* (Meny and Surel 2000), Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) differentiated between a right-wing exclusionary and a left-wing inclusionary populism. The former, typical of European parties and electorates, focuses primarily on a sociocultural dimension aimed at excluding *aliens*, while the latter, typical of Latin American parties and electorates, focuses on a socioeconomic dimension aimed at including the poor.

Three Roads to Populism

The rich debate regarding the definition and nature of populism is not complemented by strong and established theories about its antecedents (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). However, based on previous studies on the topic, we identified three main roads along which citizens develop populist orientations and voting preferences.

The Political Road

In recent decades, political systems have witnessed rapid and substantial structural changes. The ideological weakening after the fall of communist regimes in Europe and across the world has provoked a general mixing in the political landscape, coupled with fragmentation and internal conflict. On the voters' side, this implied the loss of traditional fidelity of political identification as an important criterion for political preference, with an increase in voting instability and a readiness to explore political options (Dassonneville 2018). Moreover, corruption, frequent political scandals, inefficiency of national governments, the growth of the administrative state and the emergence of supranational institutions with growing political power have all contributed to the gap between politics and citizens, who tend to express increasing distrust and detachment (Schmidt 2006). Many marginalized segments of society felt ignored by civic and political institutions, in particular by trade unions and leftist parties traditionally seen as able to represent their concerns. Intermediate bodies, which fulfilled fundamental functions in representative democracies, lost citizens' trust, while new direct forms of democracy based on the use of new technologies became appealing and seemed an effective tool for people to make themselves heard (Edwards 2006; Matsusaka 2020).

Citizens, increasingly frustrated with the workings of political institutions, developed anti-élite attitudes, a key feature of populist orientation. Populist parties, movements, and leaders expressing strong anti-establishment stances became the voice of the many citizens who perceived traditional political actors as hypocritical and incompetent, and they demanded radical and utopic political changes (Oesch 2008). In light of this, populist orientations and votes can be conceived as typical voice reactions (Hirschman 1970) of people feeling a severe lack of political representation, who

1 have lost their trust in the existing political parties and institutions, perceived as dramatically unfit to address their
2 concerns, and of the political system as a whole (Doyle 2011). The persistence of this state of affairs has produced a
3 “majoritarian type of populism” that “thrives in contexts where vast parts of the population have felt unrepresented long
4 enough to result in a generalized erosion of legitimacy” (Bornschieer 2019, p. 219). Italy could be considered an
5 embodiment of such a context (Newell 2018).

6 ***The Economic and Cultural Roads***

7 The other two roads to populism are based on the idea that a new structural cleavage between the winners and
8 losers in the process of modernization has spread in recent decades (Kriesi 2014). Hence, populism is conceived as the
9 consequence of the unfulfilled needs of the orphaned masses (Oxhorn 1998) who feel vulnerable due to the economic
10 insecurity and social disorder (Elchardus and Spruyt 2016) stemming from the cultural and economic changes fostered
11 by modernization (Teney et al. 2013).

12 In relation to the cultural road, populist orientations and votes should be particularly prominent among the
13 cultural losers of modernization – i.e., among people feeling like “strangers in their own land” (Hochschild 2016) due to
14 the uncertainty stemming from (a) the “silent revolution” that started in the 1960s–1970s and led to a radical shift from
15 materialist to post-materialist values and to the emergence of new, unconventional ways of living and thinking
16 (Inglehart 1977), and (b) the more recent massive migration flows directed towards a number of Western countries. In
17 relation to the economic road, populist orientations and votes should be particularly prominent among the economic
18 losers of modernization – i.e., people feeling at risk of losing their job and their prospects of a better future for
19 themselves and/or their offspring due to the radical restructuring of the system of production caused by modernization
20 (Betz, 2001). In other words, populist orientation and votes stem from a perceived economic threat and social
21 deprivation (Castanho Silva 2019; de Lange 2007).

22 While theories regarding the existence of political and cultural roads to populism have received consistent
23 empirical support in the literature (e.g., Teney et al. 2014), recent studies have not fully supported the notion of the
24 economic road. Working at the contextual level, Castanho Silva (2019) did not find a strong relation between national
25 economic crises and populism. Working at the individual level, Corbetta, Colloca, Cavazza, and Roccato (2018) did not
26 find a significant relation between subjective economic insecurity and populist votes in the 2018 Italian general
27 election. Mutz (2018) observed that personal economic hardship did not drive votes for Trump, while high-status
28 citizens’ subjective feeling of status threat played a major role. Finally, Remmer (2011) showed a positive relation
29 between voters’ satisfaction with the state of the economy and their support for left-wing populist Latin American
30 candidates. However, the contexts, methods, and objects of these studies are not comparable. Moreover, in the
31 prediction of populism, the extant research seldom differentiates between exclusionary and inclusionary populism,

weakening the heuristic power of the model employed. All in all, we cannot draw firm conclusions about the antecedents of populism, and some relevant questions remain open.

Populism in Italy

Italy is often considered a “laboratory of populism” and a privileged observatory for the analysis of different types and forms of this phenomenon (Blokker and Anselmi 2019). After decades of stability, the Italian party system experienced a process of almost complete disintegration in the early 1990s as a consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the legal proceedings of Tangentopoli (Bribe town). Traditional parties experienced a fatal crisis, new parties were founded, electoral law underwent the first of a number of subsequent changes, there was a break in the link between traditional cleavages and electoral choices, and Italians’ trust in institutions became weaker and weaker (Chiaromonte, Emanuele, Maggini, and Paparo 2018). In the 2000s, the political crisis was exacerbated by economic and cultural crises (Caiani 2018): A severe economic recession hit the country, and a growing number of immigrants poured into the national territory. As a result, Italy had all the main preconditions for becoming characterized by the “majoritarian type of populism” (Bornschiefer 2019). Consistent with this picture, in recent years, Italy has experienced intense voter mobility, stronger than that of other European countries (Kriesi and Pappas 2015).

At present, there is no research on the trend of populist orientations among the Italian population. This is despite nearly all of the Italian parties show some trace of populism (Corbetta et al. 2018). Moreover, the parties in Italy that are considered the most populist—the FSM and the League—have achieved growing electoral success. After the 2018 election, these two parties joined forces in a populist government that governed Italy until August 2019.

Countries with a populist political slant are usually characterized by a dominant kind of populism. Generally, exclusionary populism is typical of Europe, while inclusionary populism is typical of Latin America (Vassallo and Shin 2018). However, Italy is a very peculiar case, in that the League and the MFS embody two diverging forms of populism (Bornschiefer 2017). The League’s populism frames *the people* in cultural and ethnical terms (opposing Italians to strangers). It has a right-wing nature, focuses on the exclusion of immigrants, and is particularly prominent where the immigration issue is most strongly felt – i.e., in Northern Italy. The populism of the MFS frames the people in terms of material advantages and assets (pitching underprivileged common citizens against the most advantaged élites). From the political standpoint, although this stance is sometimes labeled as non-radical “centrist populism” (Verbeek and Zaslove 2016), it has left-wing characteristics, focuses on anti-austerity politics, and is particularly spread in Southern Italy, where unemployment is high. Consistent with these deep differences, in August 2019, the populist alliance between the League and the MFS broke down, with the MFS subsequently joining with the social-democratic Democratic Party and other minor center-left parties.

Research Design

1 In this study, we aimed at predicting Italians' populist orientations and votes in the 2019 European election, as a
2 function of the above-mentioned three roads to populism and their interactions. In doing so, we contribute to
3 overcoming four main limitations of the extant literature on populism.

4 First, the majority of previous studies focus exclusively on one or two of the three roads to populism described
5 above (e.g., Van Assche, Dhont, Van Hiel, and Roets 2018). Oesch (2008) did predict participants' votes for right-wing
6 populist parties as a function of economic, cultural, and political predictors, but his study was limited to one specific
7 nuance of populism (the probability of voting for a radical right populist party), neglecting the vote for left-wing or
8 center populist parties and general populist orientations. In this study, we addressed the role played by the three roads to
9 populism simultaneously.

10 Second, the lack of studies addressing all three roads to populism simultaneously has impeded the ability to test
11 their interactive effects. The exclusive focus on their main effects leaves the picture on the antecedents of populism
12 incomplete. Analysis of interactions among the three roads to populism could shed light on the inconsistent findings
13 concerning objective and perceived economic hardship, especially in light of the idea that independent factors need to
14 be activated in specific contexts and circumstances (e.g., Hawkins et al. 2017). For example, perceived economic
15 hardship might influence people's populist orientations and votes when co-occurring with the political or cultural roads,
16 or alternatively, political satisfaction might buffer the effect of perceived economic hardship. In this study, we explored
17 these possibilities by testing the interactions between the three roads to populism.

18 Third, the extant research analyzes *either* populist orientations (e.g., Quinlan and Tinney 2019; Rico and
19 Anduiza 2019) *or* populist votes (e.g., Oesch 2008), but not both simultaneously. This is a critical limitation, because
20 the studies that exclusively aimed to predict populist votes (a) create an artificial dichotomization between populist and
21 non-populist voters, neglecting the populist *potential* of a constituency (Roccato, Corbetta, Cavazza, and Colloca 2019),
22 (b) neglect that citizens can have populist orientations and can interpret the political world using populist lenses even in
23 the absence of populist parties and leaders in the political market (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017), and (c) censor a
24 continuous variable (populist orientations) into a dichotomous variable (populist votes), losing much of its informative
25 power (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2019). In addition, studies exclusively aimed at predicting populist orientations do not
26 say much about voting behaviors. Social-psychological research consistently shows that attitudes and behaviors can
27 have weak relations (e.g., Glasman and Albarracin 2006). Thus, populist attitudes *per se* are not valid proxies for the
28 success of populist parties in specific elections. In this study, we predicted the probability of voting for populist parties,
29 as well as citizens' populist orientations.

30 Lastly, previous predictive models of populist votes focused exclusively on one kind of populism (i.e.,
31 exclusionary or inclusionary), depending on the surveyed country. Italy was strategically chosen as a case study to fill

this additional gap in the literature. As discussed above, in Italy, certain structural conditions and circumstances favored the political success of the MFS—a left-wing inclusionary populist party—and the League—a right-wing exclusionary populist party. In this study, the prediction of voting preferences for one party or the other allowed us to disentangle differences in the specific antecedents of the two forms of populism.

Participants and Procedures

Using the computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) method, we surveyed a quota sample of the Italian general population over 18 years old, stratified according to gender, age, geographic area of residence, and municipality size ($N = 1,504$, 48.9% men, $M_{age} = 47.80$, $SD = 15.06$). The sample responded to a post-electoral survey in the week after the European elections held on May 26, 2019.

Measures

Populist orientation. We measured participants' populist orientation using the Populist Orientation (POPOR) Scale (Roccato et al. 2019), a balanced scale composed of six five-category forced-choice items, such as 'According to some people, the job of deciding political issues belongs to those we elect to the Parliament. According to others, ordinary people should be able to decide political issues directly, as it happens in referendums. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?' and 'Some people say that politicians, journalists, and financial experts are all part of the same corrupt system that has led Italy into crisis. Others say that it's not right to lump those groups all together, because they have different responsibilities. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?' (con-trait). The confirmatory factorial analysis (with all the pro-trait items correlated for statistical correction of the acquiescent response set: see Marsh 1989) indicated good fit for a unidimensional solution, $\chi^2(6) = 43.125$, $p < .001$, $CFI = .938$, $RMSEA = .053$, $SRMR = .031$.

Populist vote. Participants were asked to report whether they had voted in the European election, and if so, for whom. For the purpose of this study, we have recoded vote choice into three categories: 1 'Voted for the FSM' (16%), 2 'Voted for the League' (22%), 3 'Voted for other parties or did not vote' (62%).

Perceived economic threat. Based on Corbetta et al. (2018), we measured perceived economic threat via the following four items: (a) 'How has the financial situation of your household changed over the last three years?'; (b) 'Do you think the financial position of your household (or your future household) is (or will be) better than, worse than, or similar to the one of your birth family?' (both items had 5 response options – a lot better, better, the same, a little worse, a lot worse); (c) 'As you know, an economic crisis is influencing the whole world. Thinking about the last three years, how much has the crisis impacted on your life?' (four response options ranging from 1 'not at all' to 4 'very much'); (d) 'Imagine a 10-step ladder where at the bottom, on the first step, stand the poorest 10% people in your region, and on the highest, tenth step, stand the richest 10%. On which step would you place your household today?' The confirmatory

factor analysis (performed after recoding the four items to range between 0 and 1) indicated an excellent fit for a unidimensional solution, $\chi^2(2) = 10.401$, $p = .006$, $CFI = .993$, $RMSEA = .053$, $SRMR = .014$.

Perceived cultural threat. We administered the Sense of Threat to Local Traditions (SETLOT) Scale (Cavazza, Colloca, Corbetta, Mosso, and Roccato 2019), composed of six items. Examples are: ‘The changes we see in society are threatening our very culture’ and ‘We need to give up some traditions in order to adapt ourselves better to the times in which we live’ (con-trait). After correcting for the acquiescent response set by correlating the con-trait items (Marsh 1989), the confirmatory factor analysis indicated an excellent fit, $\chi^2(6) = 45.799$, $p < .001$, $CFI = .978$, $RMSEA = .066$, $SRMR = .029$.

Dissatisfaction with representative democracy. We asked participants to indicate their agreement, on a scale from 1 ‘I strongly disagree’ to 4 ‘I strongly agree’, with the following three statements: ‘In the last few years, the democracy in Italy has not been good at maintaining order’, ‘In the last few years, the Italian democracy has been indecisive and had too much squabbling’, and ‘In the last few years, the democracy in Italy has made the economic system running badly’. These items, included in the World Value Survey, have been widely used in social science research (e.g., Bloom and Arikan 2012). We could not evaluate its fit with a confirmatory factor analysis because of the limited number of items, but Cronbach’s α (.72) and the average inter-item correlation (.46) indicated good reliability.

Control variables. We controlled for participants’ gender (1 = male), age, and years of formal of education.

The general measurement model (with all latent variables) proved to fit the data well, $\chi^2(140) = 626.394$, $p < .001$, $CFI = .909$, $RMSEA = .048$, $SRMR = .050$. Table 1 shows the correlations among the latent factors.

Data Analyses

We tested a latent moderated structural equations model aimed at predicting participants’ populist orientation and vote choice based on perceived cultural threat, perceived economic threat, and dissatisfaction with representative democracy, as well as their first-order interactions. We have modeled these variables and their interactions as latent variables. As for the electoral choice, we predicted the votes for the FSM and the votes for the League, and used the ‘voted for other parties or did not vote’ as a reference category. In all the analyses, conducted with MPlus8 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017), we controlled for gender, age, and education. In the first step, we estimated the structural model with the direct effects of the main predictors (Model 1), without the latent interaction terms. In the second step, we added the latent interaction terms (Model 2). This stepwise procedure allowed us to compare—using the Akaike information criterion (*AIC*) and Bayesian information criterion (*BIC*)—the more parsimonious Model 1 with the less parsimonious Model 2, given that the fit indices generally used in structural equations modeling, such as *CFI*, *RMSEA*, and χ^2 , are not available for latent structural equations models with a nominal dependent variable and interactions

between latent variables. To this end, we analyzed the difference in *AIC* and *BIC*, and used this information to identify the preferable model – that is, the model with the smallest information criteria (e.g., MacCallum and Austin 2000).

Results

Table 2 reports the results of our predictive models. Age and education showed a negative association with populist orientation, while the association between gender and populist orientation was not significant (cf. Model 1). Age was negatively associated with votes for the FSM, while gender and education were negatively associated with votes for the League. More interestingly, the three main predictors showed differential associations with our outcomes. In particular, perceived cultural threat and dissatisfaction with representative democracy were both positively associated with populist orientation. In terms of vote choice, though, dissatisfaction with representative democracy was associated only with votes for the FSM, while perceived cultural threat was associated only with votes for the League. Finally, votes for the League were negatively associated with perceived economic threat.

In the second step, we added the first-order interactions to our model (cf. Model 2 in Table 2). We relied on the *AIC* and *BIC* to decide whether we should prefer this less parsimonious Model 2 to Model 1. The information criteria provided contrasting indications: The *AIC* pointed to Model 2, while the *BIC* pointed to Model 1, even when adjusted to account for the sample size. Consistent with Huang (2017), according to whom the *BIC* is a more solid index than the *AIC*, we concluded that adding the interaction terms does not improve our model. This conclusion was also supported by the fact that, among all the interaction terms, the only one reaching statistical significance was that between perceived cultural threat and dissatisfaction with representative democracy when predicting votes for the League. This interaction was neither very informative nor large in magnitude, and plausibly reached statistical significance only due to the large *N* of our dataset.

Discussion

Previous research on the determinants of populism was mostly limited to analysis of either populist orientations or populist votes, and for either exclusionary or inclusionary populist parties. Additionally, the majority of the extant studies focused exclusively on one or two determinants of populism, with no prior work addressing their interactive effects. In the present study, we took advantage of the peculiar political context in Italy, and used it as a case study to fill these knowledge gaps. We predicted both populist orientations and votes for an exclusionary or inclusionary populist party, as well as the main and interactive effects played by the political, economic, and cultural roads outlined above.

Our findings showed that, when taken together, the three roads to populism do not have the same associations with populist orientation and votes. Specifically, we found a positive association between populist orientation and citizens' cultural bewilderment derived from the mixing up of values and traditions, as well as with their negative

1 judgment about the functioning of representative democracy. However, the cultural and political roads to populism
2 showed different associations with political choices: The former had a positive association with votes for the
3 exclusionary League, and the latter had a positive association with votes for the inclusionary FSM, confirming the
4 multifunctionality of the populist political supply (e.g., Blokker and Anselmi 2019). Parties and movements interpret
5 populism in their own way, and thus appeal to different segments of voters. The observed gap between populist
6 orientation and vote choice confirmed the risk of tarring all populisms with the same brush, and it illustrated the
7 importance of analyzing them as distinct aspects of adherence to the populist supply as a function of distinct political
8 criticisms and of divergent responses to the challenges of modernization.

9 The minor role played by perceived economic insecurity, both in the expression of a populist orientation and in
10 vote choice, is particularly interesting. In this latter case, we found a negative association between perceived economic
11 insecurity and votes for the League. At first glance, this result seems surprising, but it is in line with the findings of
12 Mutz (2018), who suggested that populist votes may be interpreted as defensive attempts of high-status groups to cope
13 with perceived status threat, and with the findings of Mols and Jetten (2016), who stated that economic prosperity
14 provides fertile ground for right-wing populist parties. Specifically, by manipulating projected future economic
15 performance, these authors found that endorsement of anti-immigration messages was higher when participants
16 expected affluence rather than an economic downturn. In addition, they showed that in times of economic prosperity,
17 right-wing populist leaders tend to use powerful discursive techniques to turn objective relative gratification into
18 perceived relative deprivation, instilling a *fear of falling behind* and *status anxiety* in the electorate. This interpretation,
19 that definitely stresses the importance of differentiating between inclusionary and exclusionary populist parties, could
20 be fruitfully tested in future research. In particular, future research performed in other European countries to test the
21 appeal of exclusionary populist parties among economically insecure people would be desirable.

22 Further developments of this research could be interesting. A task for future research is to delve more deeply into
23 the dynamic of citizens' populist orientation over time in correspondence with changing contextual factors, and with
24 individual perceptions. Additionally, since our study confirmed the relevance of differentiating between populist votes
25 (that express actual populism in a society) and populist orientation (that expresses populist potential), a systematic
26 analysis of both trends throughout the years could be useful to better understand the dynamics of populism. Moreover, it
27 could be argued that a populist supply could play a healthy role for societies, in that it may convince people who are
28 dissatisfied with politics to remain within the boundaries of representative democracy, choosing to voice their opinions
29 instead of abandoning the political process (Hirschman 1970). Analysis of the determinants of vote choice focused on
30 the electorate moving from non-voting to a populist party is worthy of study. Information about participants' votes in
31 the 2018 general election was available in our dataset. However, the number of such participants was too small to allow

1 meaningful analyses. A new research study, performed on a much larger database, could test this idea. Finally, it could
2 be interesting to model populism as a multilevel phenomenon, integrating contextual indicators of the three roads to
3 populism with the predictors we have focused on at the individual level. Unfortunately, the level of aggregation we
4 could manage in our model (focused on the county) was suboptimal, in that Italian counties are very heterogeneous
5 within themselves. A multilevel study performed at a wider (i.e., national) or at a smaller (i.e., town) level could be
6 fruitful.

7 Inevitably, this study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. The cross-sectional nature of our data
8 calls for the usual caution in interpreting the direction of causality. However, it is also true that in this field, it is difficult
9 to make strong causal claims without paying the cost of a dramatic reduction of complexity and ecological validity.
10 Future research should establish the generality of the effects reported in the current investigation by conducting within-
11 participants studies. Moreover, our study is focused on one country only, and a complete replication of this work in
12 other contexts (in particular in the US, considered a specific case because the legitimacy crisis of the '80s and the
13 demise of citizenship brought out a strong individualism, Kamens 2020) could be interesting to test the generalizability
14 of our results across different nations.

15 These limitations should not overwhelm the present study's strong points that helped in understanding the factors
16 associated with citizens' propensity to endorse a populist worldview and to express this with a populist vote. The
17 generalizability of our results to the Italian population is a plus of our research, as the typical over-reliance on
18 convenience samples of university students may lead psychological research to paint a misleading portrait of human
19 nature (Sears 1986). This methodological limitation is especially problematic when studying political attitudes and
20 behaviors (Busby, Doyle, Hawkins, and Wiesehomeier 2019). The focus on the combination of populist orientations
21 and populist votes could provide innovative indications about the explanatory power of the three roads to populism,
22 facilitating differentiation between voting for inclusionary or exclusionary populist parties. Consistent with this, the
23 context where we have performed our study is another strong point of our research: The opportunity to predict the votes
24 for two different populist parties helped in understanding the common and differential dynamics linked to populist
25 votes.

26 To conclude, our study extended previous research on populism by combining a psychological approach to those
27 of political science and sociology, thus reaching a more complex representation of the global and pervasive political
28 phenomenon characterizing our time.

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1 Table 1. Standardized correlations among the latent variables used in the study

	1	2	3
1. Populist orientation	-		
2. Cultural threat	.58***	-	
3. Economic threat	.12*	.14***	-
4. Dissatisfaction with representative democracy	.50***	.51***	.12**

2 *Note:* *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

3

4

5

Table 2. Latent moderated structural equations model aimed at predicting populist orientation and vote choice. Unstandardized coefficients.

	Model 1						Model 2					
	Populist		Vote for		Vote for League		Populist		Vote for		Vote for League	
	orientation		FSM				orientation		FSM			
	coeff.	<i>p</i>	coeff.	<i>p</i>	coeff.	<i>p</i>	coeff.	<i>p</i>	coeff.	<i>p</i>	coeff.	<i>p</i>
Gender	-0.067	.057	0.083	.578	-0.305	.033	-.069	.090	.079	.597	-.312	.029
Age	-0.005	<.001	0.010	.038	0.004	.426	-.005	.004	.011	.027	.004	.379
Education	-0.019	<.001	-0.027	.205	-0.059	.004	-.018	<.001	-.026	.214	-.056	.007
Cultural threat	0.275	<.001	-0.021	.884	7.674	<.001	.277	<.001	.016	.909	1.395	<.001
Economic threat	-0.014	.932	-0.923	.144	-2.321	<.001	.053	.845	-.854	.175	-2.892	<.001
Dissatisfaction with democracy	0.197	<.001	0.464	.006	0.267	.108	.200	.035	.427	.013	.473	.018
Cultural threat X Dissatisfaction with democracy							-.093	.080	-.184	.314	-.673	.019
Economic threat X Dissatisfaction with democracy							.500	.134	-.267	.825	.578	.652
Cultural threat X Economic threat							-.553	.073	-.683	.473	.977	.351
<i>AIC</i>					58551.803						58549.946	
<i>BIC</i>					59008.969						59054.955	
Adjusted <i>BIC</i>					58735.770						58753.166	